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WESTERN CIVILIZATION AND THE BIRTH-RATE.

EDWARD A. ROSS.

A century ago Robert Malthus showed that the spontaneous fecundity of man is such that, with a purely natural mortality, population doubles in twenty-five years, whereas the subsistence obtainable from a given area cannot be indefinitely increased. He showed furthermore that, since the reproductive instincts are in no wise correlated with man's power to increase the food-supply, population *tends* to increase even when additional numbers can no longer be supported. Under such circumstances the equilibration of population with resources is brought about by war, misery, plague, famine, and vice, which raise the death-rate until it equals the natural birth-rate. Although this cruel mode of equilibration has prevailed through human history, a milder mode is possible if, by taking thought, men will restrict reproduction until the births no longer exceed the deaths. This, however, presupposes more foresight and self-control than can be looked for in the average man, so Malthus saw no prospect of the abolition of poverty, cherished little hope for the laboring masses, and painted the future of society with a somberness that gave economics its nickname of "the dismal science".

It is nothing to the discredit of Malthus's doctrines that he did not foresee certain social transformations—democracy, the emancipation of women, the replacement of custom imitation by fashion imitation—which have generalized his "preventive check" until the birth-rate

of entire populations betrays the domination of the instincts by the will. Although the population of Europe leaped from 187 millions to 400 millions during the nineteenth century, the last thirty years show a steady decline in the birth-rate.

TABLE I
BIRTHS PER THOUSAND OF POPULATION

	1876-80	1896-1900	Fall in 20 Years	Fall to 1902-03
Norway	31.5	30.4	1.1	2.9
Austria	38.8	37.1	1.7	2.2
Denmark	32.1	30.2*	1.9	2.8
Switzerland	31.3	28.7*	2.6	3.6
Ireland	25.8	23.2	2.6	2.7
Italy	36.8	34.0	2.8	3.5
Belgium	31.9	28.8	3.1	2.2
France	25.4	22.4	3.2	3.8
Germany	39.2	36.0	3.2	5.3
Sweden	30.2	26.9	3.3	3.8
Holland	36.4	32.5*	3.9	4.8
Hungary	44.1	39.7	4.4	5.3
Scotland	34.7	30.2	4.5	6.1
England and Wales	35.4	29.3*	6.1	6.8

* 1891-1900.

That the tendency is not due to a darkening of the economic horizon appears from the similar behavior of the prosperous Australasian peoples.

TABLE II
AUSTRALASIAN BIRTH-RATES

	New South Wales	Victoria	New Zealand
1871-75.....	39.0	35.6	40.0
1876-80.....	38.5	31.4	41.3
1881-85.....	37.6	30.7	36.5
1886-90.....	36.3	32.7	31.2
1891-95.....	32.9	30.9	27.6
1896-1900.....	27.9	26.2	25.7

Few American states register births, but the proportion of children revealed by successive censuses discloses in what direction we are moving.

TABLE III

NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS TO 1,000 WOMEN OF
CHILD-BEARING AGE

1850.....	626	1880.....	559
1860.....	634	1890.....	485
1870.....	572	1900.....	479

The fecundity of the foreign-born element, stronger now in our population than in 1850, obscures somewhat the tendencies prevailing among native Americans. What these are appears from the following table:

TABLE IV

NUMBER OF OFFSPRING BORN IN FAMILIES OF COLLEGE GRADUATES

	Middlebury College	Wesleyan University	New York University*
1805-09.....	5.6	...	...
1810-19.....	4.8	...	...
1820-29.....	4.1	...	...
1830-39.....	3.9	4.5	4.0
1840-49.....	3.4	3.3	3.2
1850-59.....	2.9	2.2	2.9
1860-69.....	2.8	2.6	2.5
1870-74.....	2.3	...	...
1875-79.....	1.8	...	...

* These figures for New York University are for the decades 1835-44, 1845-54, etc.

Let it not be imagined that the reduction in fecundity has been at the expense of the natural increase of population. The death-rate has fallen even more than the birth-rate, so that during the nineties the European peoples grew at the old rate of 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. per annum. Since, however, the influences lowering the birth-rate are by no means the same as those lessening mortality, it is likely the former will continue to operate after the latter have spent their force. This is why we may look in the near future for a retardation in the numerical growth of the occidental peoples.

A phenomenon so widespread and striking is a challenge to the tyro and the fanatic, and hence all manner of silly, cheap, or partial explanations compete for public credence. Some attribute it to physiological sterility induced by alcoholism, city life, and high pressure, forgetting that the child crop of sober, rural communities is often scantier than that of intemperate mining or industrial towns, and that the falling-off in the birth-rate seems due to smaller size of families rather than to the greater frequency of childless couples. New South Wales, with a lower birth-rate than England, has less than half the proportion of sterile unions. What means it, moreover, that the Australasian population, with its surpassing physique and vitality, shows in recent years an abrupt decline in fecundity?

Some lay the phenomenon to the industrial emancipation of women and the comfortable celibacy of cities, neglecting the statistics which show there is no marked weakening of the inclination to marry. The true cause is one that will make clear why, for example, the native married women of Massachusetts bear only seven-elevenths as many children as women coming from Germany, seven-thirteenths as many as those from Ireland, and half as many as those from French Canada. Others blame the broadening freedom of divorce, unmindful that divorceless Ireland has only four-fifths the birth-rate of easy-divorce Switzerland, that teeming Germany is five times as inclined to break the conjugal bond as Canada, where the size of the family shrank a twentieth during the nineties, and that prolific Japan leads the world with nearly twenty times the divorce-rate of stationary France. Still others blame the postponement of marriage, pointing out that marriage at 24.5 years as with English brides, at 25.5 as among those of Massachusetts, or at 26.5 as

among college-bred women, cuts deeply into the fecund years. But they overlook the fact that the last child in the average family arrives seven and a half years after marriage, so that even the woman who weds at 26.5 years ceases child-bearing with yet many fertile years before her.

In the face of the hobby-riders I maintain that the cause of the shrinkage in fecundity lies in the human will as influenced by certain factors which have their roots deep in the civilization of our times.

One master-trait of contemporary society is democracy. The barriers of caste are down, and less and less is a man's place in society fixed by his origin. The more flourishing peoples grade men according to something that can be acquired—wealth, efficiency, knowledge, character. Wide stairways are opened between the social levels, and men are exhorted to climb if they can. In such case prudence bids each avoid whatever will impede his ascent or imperil his social standing. To the climber children are incumbrances, and so the ambitious dread the handicap of an early marriage and a large family. When, as so often in these days of anti-child-labor laws and protracted schooling, the additional child is a drag on the social advancement of the family, that child is not likely to be born.

With the wiping-out of sharp class lines, inherited standards of living lose their grip. Wants and tastes once confined to the social *élite* spread resistlessly downward and infect the masses. Tidal waves of imitation carry the craving for luxuries, hitherto looked upon as the prerogative of the rich, among millions of people of limited means, and these in their endeavor to gratify their newly awakened wants learn to economize in offspring. The little stranger trenches on raiment, bric-a-brac, up-

holstery, travel, entertainment. Here the decencies, there the comforts, yonder the refinements and vanities of life compete with the possible child and bar it from existence.

Another factor is the emancipation of women. Every child taxes the father's purse, but the mother's body. A reputed inferiority of women, as in the Orient or in eastern Europe, degrades her to a passive instrument of man, subordinates her entirely to wifely functions so that her birth-pangs do not count. The great movement that has burst the fetters on woman's mind, and opened to her so many professional and industrial careers, raises her value and weight in the marriage partnership and causes the heavy physiological and personal cost of excessive maternity to be more considered by husband as well as by wife. When the size of the family is determined from man's view-point alone, the controlling consideration is pecuniary; and hence Malthus drew his pessimistic conclusion that the prosperity of the masses tends constantly to defeat itself by stimulating the growth of numbers until poverty again reigns. But when spouses come to the woman's point of view, the pain-and-worry cost of enlarging the family remains a bar even when the money cost need no longer be considered.

Something, too, must be said of the decay of religious beliefs. Parents who "trust in Providence" and hold, with Luther, that "God makes children and he will provide for them," are rare nowadays. More and more the age chimes in with Matthew Arnold when he says:

A man's children are not really *sent*, any more than the pictures upon his wall, or the horses in his stable are *sent*; and to bring people into the world, when one cannot afford to keep them and oneself decently and not too precariously . . . is . . . by no means an accomplishment of the divine will or a fulfillment of

Nature's simplest laws, but is . . . contrary to reason and the will of God.

Piety, moreover, promoted parentage by reconciling woman to her lot as mother and drudge. The struggle of woman to realize an individuality has obliged her to rebel against her Biblical status and spurn the counsel of submission to the curse of Eve; so that the progress of unbelief is not without a bearing on the decline of the birth-rate.

Powerful as are the motives arrayed against superfecundity, they operate only in so far as they are coupled with foresight and self-control. In the modern world parents may not rid themselves of the unwelcome child, so that it is only by being foreseen and anticipated that the ever-more-acutely-felt burden of that child can limit the size of the family. Every influence, therefore, that enlightens, or enthrones reason over impulse, helps to break the scepter of Ishtar, the cruel goddess that has so unspeakably tormented mankind. In this direction work the universal instruction, cheap press, free libraries, and voluntary associations, that are irradiating the social deeps. Moreover, industrialism, with its enormous pressure and harsh penalties, is compelling the ignorant, the careless, and the animal to *think*; so that, in fact, the principal features of the life of to-day are accomplices in the restriction of fecundity.

Our age glories most that Science and Technique are able to develop resources to meet the demands of a swelling population. Ought we not rather to glory in the fact that the civilization wrought out within the memory of living men is the first that ever really solved on a great scale the problem of painlessly equilibrating population to resources? The civilization of the Orient failed to lift

up woman or bid the lowly aspire, and hence it was never able to deliver man from nature's grim agencies for adjusting numbers to the food-supply—war, famine, misery, plague, and vice. The civilization of the Middle Ages succeeded no better, and the surviving peoples of that type in eastern Europe show a prolificacy that scourges them with misery, hunger-migration, and an appalling infant mortality. Latter-day occidental civilization alone has solved the riddle of the Sphinx, and it has been able to do it because it is *democratic, individualistic, feminist, secular, and enlightened*.

What, now, are the effects of reducing the size of the average family?

One effect is that diffusion of economic well-being which registers itself in a rising plane of comfort, a growth of savings, and a wider diffusion of ownership. Striking, indeed, is the contrast in condition between the prudent French peasantry and the reckless mining or factory towns of central Europe, or the spawning rural communities in Russia and Roumania. Among the west European peoples not only is the mean duration of life rapidly rising, but an increasing proportion of lives is rounded out to the term allotted by the Psalmist. This gain in longevity is partly due to the better support and care of the aged, who no longer need compete for attention with an overlarge brood of wailing infants. Again, a decline in fecundity lessens infant mortality; for often the sole effect of prolificacy is to fill the cemetery with tiny graves. The French Canadians, famed for their quivers of twelve, thirteen, or even twenty, do not show the census-taker larger families than the other Canadians. Among the working classes babies that come close together lack greatly in feeding, care, and medical attention, so that the restricted family may rear the larger number.

When, as in certain teeming districts of Russia, the mother must go to work in the fields, leaving the hungry nursling to suck poultices of chewed bread tied to its hands and its feet, a barbarous birth-rate of 52 per thousand is shadowed by the death within a year of a third of those born. A great city at best is not benign to infancy; yet, in 1902, the death-rate in Moscow for children under one year was more than three times that of Rome, Paris, or Edinburgh. The difference during the first year alone amounted to a full fourth of all born. Consider, moreover, the significance of the fact that Russia, with 49.5 births per thousand, loses 31 per cent. the first year; Bavaria, with 36.8 births, loses 24 per cent.; Norway, with 30 births, loses 9 per cent. These aborted lives add nothing to national or racial strength; they are simply sacrifices of the innocent to the Moloch of immoderate maternity.

After all, however, the master-consequence of a restricted birth-rate, the one result that dwarfs all others, is that with the intelligent adaptation of numbers to prospects ceases population-pressure, the principal cause of war, mass poverty, wolfish competition, and class conflict; for, in the words of Huxley,

so long as unlimited multiplication goes on, no social organization which has ever been devised, or is likely to be devised, no fiddle-faddling with the distribution of wealth, will deliver society from the tendency to be destroyed by the reproduction within itself in its intensest form of that struggle for existence, the limitation of which is the object of society.

Once it seemed as if man's propensity to multiply foredoomed the race to live ever in the presence of vast, immedicable want and woe. However smiling the gardens of Daphne, they had always to slope down into a huge, malodorous quagmire of wretchedness. The wheel of

Ixion, the cup of Tantalus, symbolized humanity striving ever by labor and ingenuity to relieve itself of a painful burden, only to have that burden inexorably rolled back upon it by its own fatal fecundity. The unlooked-for promptness with which, under the influence of democracy and public education, the masses have acquired a sense of responsibility in the matter of family, bids us look for a time when the specter of over-population, with strife, misery, and famine in its ghastly train, will be finally laid, and society will for the first time become master of its destiny.

But there are disquieting effects which must be taken into account.

The sway of the will in a matter hitherto left to blind instinct works a veritable revolution and cannot but breed certain harms of its own. At first the new foresight is used wantonly and destructively. The same individualizing influences that have genially tempered the general fecundity prompt some couples to a selfish evasion of all duties to the race. Salutory is restriction so far as it springs from a wise solicitude for the true welfare of offspring; but when it springs from personal cravings and ambitions, it may go too far. No one can tell where it will stop. The refusal to be encumbered in the pursuit of vanities might, if it became general, cause population to dwindle in the midst of an Eden. The fall of the birth-rate in roomy New South Wales from 37 to 27 in fourteen years is a portent. Shall we live to see the mother of more than three regarded as a public benefactor and placed on the pay-roll of the state? This exaggerated individualism, that avoids marriage or else dodges its natural consequences, forebodes the extinction of the class, the people, or the race that adopts it. The false ideals behind such race-threatening frivolity need

to be combated in the name of real values. Nor may we blink the fact that in order to control the size of the family some have resorted to means fraught with grave and insidious injury to health.

In the matter of reproduction it is not yet possible to substitute intelligence for instinct without creating a mental attitude responsible for numerous one-child and two-child families, where both parents and children miss many of the best lessons of life. The children reared in such stunted families, instead of surpassing in stamina and character, fall below the average. The type to be standardized is not the family of one to three, but the family of four to six. The one-child or two-child ideal growingly in favor with the middle class would, if popularized, hurry us to extinction. In such families prodigious pains are taken to keep breath in defective or sickly children. Instead of being weeded out in infancy by natural process, the weaklings are kept alive by lavish care, and the national vitality is lowered.

Since it is the rising that first feel the individualizing influences, these check their increase while yet the stocks below them breed at the old reckless rate. The outcome is a numerical gain of mediocres over capables, threatening an eventual dearth of ability in the race thus impoverished at the top. This untoward phenomenon is, however, but a passing phase. The lower strata are coming *or may be brought* within reach of the influences that moderate multiplication. If we speed up the individualizing agencies till the unthinking and brutish have become a mere remnant, the danger will disappear. Furthermore, the closer legal restriction of child labor, by making offspring expensive instead of profitable, may check the free propagation of stocks deficient in capacity or parental altruism.

It needs to be pointed out that the people that practices restriction sooner than its neighbors must resign itself to seeing its more fecund rivals outstrip it in colonizing the waste places. Says the New South Wales Commission on the Decline of the Birth Rate:

Public men . . . have referred hopefully to the day when Australia with her teeming millions will hold a commanding place among the peoples of the world. The patriotic ardor inspired by this hopeful anticipation is, however, destined to be cooled in the contemplation of the fact that, while Russia and Japan, prospective rivals of Australia for supremacy in the western Pacific, are already seeking outlets beyond their own borders for the energies of their ever-growing peoples, it will be forty-six and a half years before Australia, with her three and three quarter millions of inhabitants, and dependent alone on her natural increase (if this even be maintained at its present rate), will have doubled her population; and one hundred and sixty-eight years before her numbers will have reached the present population of Japan.

Nevertheless, the equilibrium may be restored by the overprolific people adopting the standards of the less prolific. Even if births are too few in Australasia, it is noteworthy that Japan is taking measures—*e. g.*, the higher education of girls—against her super-fecundity, and it is certain the masses of Russia will not much longer pullulate in the pit of mediævalism.

Again, it is possible that the fair prospect opened to the masses of a people that restricts increase may be darkened by the pressing-in of hunger-bitten hordes from the man-stifled neighbor lands. More than a million and a quarter Italians, Basques, Germans, and Belgians have been drawn into hollow and prosperous France by the lure of high wages. Coolies from overstocked China reach eagerly for the opportunities that Australians, Cana-

dians, and Americans are wisely holding open for their children. If the low-pressure society slams its doors upon the indraught, it may later have to reckon with an armed invasion from some quarter where cannon food is cheap. Numbers tell. France dreads prolific Germany. Germany trembles before yet more prolific Russia. Europe fears the awakening of the teaming yellow race. In South Africa the whites stand aghast at the rabbit-like increase of the blacks. Until backward mankind has clambered up, or been lifted up, from the animal plane, the sunny spots created by scientific industry coupled with prudent parentage will be menaced by an influx, peaceful or armed, from the crowded areas, and the bristling frontiers between peoples and races will have to remain.

It is, moreover, questionable if the slackening of increase in the white race is not premature. Much of the globe lies under-developed and capable, under the vivifying touch of the cunning hand, of maintaining in comfort many additional millions. For some time yet overflow currents may well stream out from the seats of the white race to occupy and develop the backward lands. If these dry up now, the void will assuredly be filled with the children of the black, brown, and yellow peoples, and the type that has so far achieved the most will contribute less than it might to the blood of the ultimate race that is to fill the globe.

The revolt against senseless parentage is a colossal secular phenomenon of varied aspects, and few of its appraisers are competent to judge more than the one or two aspects that appeal to them. No one who envisages all the aspects of this pregnant thing, who succeeds in seeing it steadily and seeing it whole, will laud or condemn it in unqualified terms. Granted; but the question forces

itself: Is the core of the thing good or bad? Is the dethronement of Ishtar as mistress of social destiny a blessing with incidental harm, or an evil with incidental benefit? So pressed, I would answer: *Restriction is a movement at bottom salutary, and the undoubted evils in its train appear to be minor, or transient, or self-limiting, or curable.* I shall have against me mystics, clerics, *a priori* moralists, sentimentalists, æsthetes, militarists, capitalists, and politicians; but, nevertheless, I take my stand with those who hate famine, war, saber-tooth competition, class antagonism, the degradation of the masses, the wasting of children, the dwarfing of women, and the cheapening of men.